

NORTH AMERICAN

WETLANDS

CONSERVATION ACT

project flash

Alaska Partnerships Receive \$100,000 for Wetlands Projects

On June 9, 2004, the North American Wetlands Conservation Council reported to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission that it had approved **\$100,000** in funding for **two projects** in **Alaska** under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act's Small Grants Program. The Act is nonregulatory and calls for voluntary partnerships to develop and implement wetlands and associated uplands conservation projects to benefit wildlife. Projects must meet certain biological criteria to be considered for funding, and partners must be able to match the grant request 1:1 with nonfederal funds.

Conserving Wetlands in the Beluga Wetlands Complex and Along the Anchor River Project

The Beluga Wetlands Complex is adjacent to the City of Homer's airport, in the **Kenai Peninsula Borough**, off Kachemak Bay. The complex provides nesting or stopover habitat for numerous **Pacific Flyway** migratory waterfowl species, such as gadwall, American wigeon, mallard, northern pintail, greater scaup, red-breasted merganser, Canada goose, trumpeter swan, and bufflehead. Populations of red-necked grebe, sandhill crane, and dunlin, among other waterbirds, also can be found here. And Alaska's "state land mammal," the moose, is known to take advantage of the forage provided by willows growing in the complex's riparian areas.

While a portion of the complex lies secure within the Homer Airport State Critical Habitat Area, much of the complex is in private ownership, and those wetlands near the airport are under threat of commercial development. Project partner Kachemak Moose Habitat, Inc. (KMHI), will work with willing private landowners to permanently protect 27 acres of this important habitat through either fee-title or conservation-easement acquisitions.

Additionally, KMHI, along with Kachemak Heritage Land Trust, will build on the habitat conservation successes achieved through a previous Act-supported project in which 324 acres along the Anchor River north of Homer were protected through conservation easements. The river provides crucial spawning habitat for king and silver salmon, dolly varden, and steelhead. Because of this world-class anadromous sport fishery, the river's habitats also are under threat of development. Here, too, the partners will purchase conservation easements from willing landowners.

Partners will accomplish all these activities using their **\$50,000** grant and **\$52,000** in matching funds. Their work on this project also helps to advance the habitat goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan's **Pacific Coast Joint Venture**.

For more information about this project, contact Lynn Whitmore, Kachemak Moose Habitat, Inc., lwhitmore@homerelectric.com, (907) 235-3370, or Keith Morehouse, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, keith_morehouse@fws.gov, (703) 358-1784.

DIVISION OF BIRD HABITAT
CONSERVATION
NORTH AMERICAN WETLANDS
CONSERVATION COUNCIL
4401 NORTH FAIRFAX DRIVE
MAIL STOP 4075
ARLINGTON, VA 22203
birdhabitat.fws.gov • 703/358-1784



Stikine River Wetlands Acquisition: North Knig Slough (Schwartz Tract) Project

The Stikine River Delta, located between Petersburg and Wrangel, is the largest tidewater estuary in southeast Alaska. The estuary supports significant runs of salmon, providing critical rearing and feeding habitat. Its extensive eel grass and kelp beds sustain a large variety of marine life. Brown and black bears and moose also make their way here. And, the delta is one of the most important **Pacific Flyway** migratory bird areas in coastal Alaska. More than 15,000 snow geese blanket the delta in mid-April on their way to Wrangell Island in Siberia, and 1 million shorebirds, particularly the western sandpiper, scurry around the mudflats in search of invertebrates for sustenance, allowing them to continue their journey to the breeding grounds.

Northern pintail, mallard, greater scaup, Pacific greater white-fronted goose, and American wigeon, all designated as a priority for conservation by the Act's North American Wetlands Conservation Council, are commonly seen in the project area. The entire Alaska population of the lesser sandhill crane, a priority nonwaterfowl species, uses the delta as a stopover area on its way both to and from breeding grounds. Raptors commonly partaking of the repast offered in the delta include bald eagle, northern harrier, sharp-shinned hawk, merlin, and red-tailed hawk.

The primary threat to this area is the subdivision of privately owned land for second-home development. The environment is highly attractive to people interested in hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing, and tracts on the far east side of Farm Island have already been subdivided and sold for such uses. The Schwartz Tract was offered for sale, and project partners Southeast Alaska Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, and USDA Forest Service decided to buy the land to protect its habitat and the adjacent wilderness areas. They received a **\$50,000** grant to help with the purchase of the 160-acre parcel and will add another **\$464,000** to achieve their goal. This project's acquisition also complements the habitat conservation goals of the **Pacific Coast Joint Venture**.

For more information about this project, contact Diane Mayer, Southeast Alaska Land Trust, setrust@ptialaska.net, (907) 586-3100, or Keith Morehouse, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, keith_morehouse@fws.gov, (703) 358-1784.